

**City Council of the City of New Castle**  
**Special Meeting**  
**Town Hall, 201 Delaware Street, New Castle**  
**Monday, June 22, 2015 at 6:30 p.m.**

**Call to order:** 6:30 p.m.

**Roll Call:**

Councilperson Megginson - present  
Councilperson Vannucci - present  
Council President Ratchford - present  
Councilperson Petty - present  
Councilperson Di Mondì - present

Also present:

William Barthel, City Administrator  
Donald Reese, Mayor  
Janet Carlin, City Treasurer  
Kathy Wallace, Finance Manager  
Daniel Losco, City Solicitor

**New Business**

Councilperson Megginson **Motioned to Table the First Order of Business and Move on to the Second.** Councilperson Vannucci Seconded. The **Motion Passed** with three votes in favor:

Councilperson Megginson - Aye  
Councilperson Vannucci - Aye  
Council President Ratchford - Nay  
Councilperson Petty - Nay  
Councilperson Di Mondì - Aye

**Discussion by Council concerning the possible establishment of meadows in the City of New Castle, mowing requirements under §140-18 of the City Housing and Property Maintenance Code, as well as potential amendments thereto as they may relate to meadows.**

Councilperson Megginson proposed that Chapter 140, Section 18 of the Code be reworded so that meadows would be limited to Penn Farm and that minimal mowing would not be permitted. Councilperson Megginson has never seen a meadow or minimal mowing in a residential area. The ideal place for a meadow is Penn Farm where there is parking available for visitors. Councilperson Megginson would like there to be a vote on his proposal with the specific wording to be determined. The amended section of the Code would be read at future meetings.

Councilperson Vannucci stated that there is language in the Code about grass cutting through the City. The Councilperson believes that if the Trustees are permitted to use minimal

mowing, the residents must be allowed to do the same. The Code has to be equally enforced. Meadows should not be in a residential area. Councilperson Vannucci is not against meadows but it needs to be in a special place.

Councilperson Di Mondì commented that meadows are fine but are concentrated in the west end of the City. He believes there are seven meadows in Dobbinsville.

Councilperson Vannucci observed that when the City was in charge, the grass was always cut and trimmed. When the Trustees started cutting the grass, there was suddenly reasons why there is no need to cut the grass. Today, residents came in to City Hall to complain because they got citations for not cutting their grass.

The City Solicitor stated that there is no clear reference to meadows in the Zoning Code. In the City Code's Property Maintenance Section, there is a definition for meadows which implies that they must be permitted to exist. There is specific reference to parkland, playgrounds and conservation areas being allowed. There is some level of ambiguity. An Ordinance does require three cuts per year at designated times.

Councilperson Vannucci commented that the homeowners must cut their grass. Solicitor Losco replied that residential parcels are handled differently than open spaces of an acre or more. It is possible to have restrictions such as total height, number of cuts, or not permitted within a specific distance of homes.

Councilperson Petty said that she doesn't know what defines a meadow and came to the meeting tonight to find out. There is talk about high weeds. In Buttonwood, there are weeds all over the place. Where is John Lloyd to enforce the Code in Buttonwood? The grass is high along Railroad Avenue. There is a tree that needs to be pulled from a drainage ditch. Councilperson Petty suggested that they stop talking about weeds to let the Trustees make their presentation to see what a meadow looks like.

President Ratchford stated that when the topic was first discussed, Council agreed to ask the Trustees to make a presentation. The presentation should be made before there is a vote.

Councilperson Megginson **Motioned to Revisit and Reword Chapter 140, Section 18.** The Motion was seconded by Councilperson Vannucci. The **Motion Passed** with three votes:

- Councilperson Megginson - Aye
- Councilperson Vannucci - Aye
- Council President Ratchford - Nay
- Councilperson Petty - Nay
- Councilperson Di Mondì - Aye

Trustee Tommy Wilson stated that he is the quarterback of the meadows for the City of New Castle and can answer questions about cost. The amount spent on grass cutting was identified while the Trustees were looking for ways to reduce costs. In the short term, the cost of creating the meadows is higher than cutting the grass. In the long term, the costs will be less. Mr. Wilson will be around to answer questions after the meeting.

**Presentation by the Trustees of the New Castle Common concerning the establishment and maintenance of meadows on Trustee property in the City.**

Drew Hayes of Foresites Associates on Delaware Street in New Castle made the presentation.

Mr. Hayes listed the following as important attributes of Meadows:

- Important to water filtration.
- Dramatically increase pollinators for food production
- Food source for birds and other critical habitat.

In Dobbinsville, there are three meadows located 150 feet from homes and 50 feet from play areas. There will be 12 foot wide paths to walk through. In Bull Hill, the meadow is about 60 feet from the back of homes.

A very specialized machine that is a no-till, seed drill was used to plant the seed. Mr. Hayes selected the seed mix and calibrated the machine. The signage indicates a Pollinator Meadow. The area is in the process of change. He is pleased with the germination rate. It will be a three year process to change from baby plants to a complete meadow.

Once the meadow is established, the plants are in for the long haul and have large root systems that stabilize the earth. Nurse crops are planted to help the long-term plants get established. Included are annual wild flowers that are similar to what is along the highways that add color and shade for the plants while they get established. The goal is to have blooms all year.

Big institutions have embraced the native plant movement. There is a need for habitat for everything in the food chain. The Trustees are in good company. There is a national movement to eliminate turf and replace it with meadows. The larger areas should be given consideration to remove lawns and add meadows.

Bees do most of the work of pollinators. One out of every four bites of food is the result of insect pollination.

The Trustees are pushing a green agenda that includes pollinator meadows, shoreline restorations, stormwater and drainage improvements and minimal mowing. They want to change from unproductive ecology to an ecologically rich environment.

Councilperson Vannucci commented that a meadow was tried behind Chestnut Street two years ago. Now there are three places. Why not put the meadow at the farm and take kids out there to teach them about it? City Council members represent the whole city and residents don't want it. In a meeting with the residents of Dobbinsville, the Trustees said there would only be one meadow.

Councilperson Megginson asked how many meadows are in New Castle County. Mr. Hayes does not know the answer.

Councilperson Di Mondì stated that the people of Dobbinsville wouldn't mind a meadow as a shield from the river walkway but don't want it near the playground. Why take all the spaces from this little two-block community? The meadows should not be concentrated in Dobbinsville.

Mr. Hayes explained that the work in years past were transitional steps. They are now in the process of growing the meadows which will include defined trails. There was a demonstration meadow in a small area at Bull Hill that helped with understanding how to install it. This year is the beginning of the meadow creation process. In previous years, the sites were designated as minimal mowing and were not meadows.

Councilperson Vannucci stated that he is not against meadows but they need to be in appropriate locations such as Penn Farm. They shouldn't be in communities. He thinks it's a cop-out not to cut the grass.

Mr. Wilson responded to Councilperson Di Mondì's question about how the sites were selected and why the meadows are concentrated in Dobbinsville by explaining that area is the largest open space owned by the Trustees that is not wet land. The Trustees don't own the property at end of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. The property behind the ferry wharf can be meadow. The property by the tennis court is not large enough.

Councilperson Petty stated that there isn't a meadow in Buttonwood and there's a lot of space available to plant a meadow. Mr. Wilson replied that the property doesn't belong to the Trustees.

Sally Denton of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street stated that more children live in Dobbinsville than any other area of the city and asked why would meadows be located there? She believes that poor people are getting pushed around. Locating meadows in Dobbinsville is not fair and is inconsiderate of their needs.

Dorsey Fiske of East 3<sup>rd</sup> Street commented that meadows are where children used to play. They're fascinating. They don't just play on manicured turf.

Robert Thomas of 7<sup>th</sup> Street stated that meadow behind Bull Hill has been worked on for three years but there are no flowers. A good space for a meadow is the landfill by the steel mill. Mr. Thomas is not against meadows but where it is located.

Mr. Hayes oversaw the process completely and the meadows are seeded. He acknowledged that placement seems to be the problem.

Sally Denton of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street agreed with Ms. Fiske about children playing in the meadows but we didn't have Lyme disease.

Robert Arnold of Dobbinsville is concerned that the only predator mentioned is the dragonfly but there will be mice and snakes and probably more mosquitos. Trucks that come through

create more pollution. He has called about the trucks. Many of the trucks are tankers from the refinery.

Robert Thomas of 7<sup>th</sup> Street stated that when we give our opinion, we get attacked. It shouldn't be about personal agendas. Come ask people where the meadows should be.

Councilperson Megginson stated that Longwood Gardens recommends slacks, long sleeve shirts and hats for walking in their meadow. Mr. Hayes concurred with their recommendation due to the exceptionally high deer population. Alice Riehl of W 4<sup>th</sup> Street countered that she has been to the Longwood Gardens meadow and found no signage or other information about how to dress.

Judie Baldini of South Street is not affected by meadows but noted that in tonight's discussion there is no delineation between tall grass and meadows. Besides where they are, everyone needs to be educated to make decisions. Meadows have a different and important purpose than grass.

President Ratchford asked if the meadows would be cut. Mr. Hayes explained that meadows are a self-sustaining ecosystem. Meadows will be cut one time in early spring. Summer meadow is flowers that can't be cut. In fall, the meadow produces seeds that get the birds through the winter.

Marianne Caven of W 3<sup>rd</sup> Street asked about snakes and animals that might be in the habitat. Mr. Hayes replied that nuisance species such as skunks, rats and snakes are attracted to dense urban areas due to grubs in lawns and debris from log piles. They don't live in meadows.

Robert Arnold of Dobbinsville asked about an increased incidence of predators coming to the area of the meadows. Mr. Hayes stated that snakes and mice will be in yards in higher populations than in meadows. Mr. Arnold asked where the money being saved from not mowing is going. Mr. Wilson replied that the Trustees have two sources of funds. One is restricted to maintaining and improving Trustee property and the other is used to support community non-profits like the Goodwill Fire Department. Sometimes they have to invest money to save money. The Trustees view the \$80,000 expected to be spent over the next three years on developing the meadows to be an investment that in the long term will save money and bring benefits to the citizens.

The President asked for a **Motion for Council to Meet in Executive Session** to discuss collective bargaining regarding the AFSCME Contract to finalize information for the budget review and finalization. Councilperson Megginson motioned, Councilperson Vannucci seconded and the **Motion Passed** unanimously.

**City Council reconvened in open session at 8:12 PM.**

### **2015/2016 Budget Review**

President Ratchford introduced the final budget review with a description of the budgeting process. The budget is to be finalized tonight and the tax rate determined.

City Administrator Barthel distributed the current budget spreadsheets (See Attachment I) and provided an update on the total. The actual revenue for the current fiscal year is \$186,032 higher than budgeted. A surplus of \$297,527 is projected. The Fiscal Year 2015/2016 has a shortfall of \$235,029 but with the carryover from this fiscal year the budget balances at \$4,859,266

The savings from the City Calendar is from not mailing it. It will still be produced but will need to be picked up in the City Offices.

The budget includes a 5-year lease-to-purchase agreement to replace the dump truck that is almost 20 years old and is rusting out. There is no room for further discounting for paying cash.

Councilperson Di Mondì read a statement (See Attachment II) to propose a tax increase of 2% that would result in a \$20 increase per year per for the average \$1000 residential home tax assessment. Councilperson Di Mondì **Motioned that the Tax Rate be Increased to 122.4.** There was no second.

President Ratchford stated that the City's tax rate is higher than most cities so New Castle needs to continue to manage and look for other sources of revenue.

**Motion, Discussion and Vote on Resolution 2015-28**, to Set FY 2015-16 Tax Rate and Adopt the 2015-16 City Budget.

President Ratchford read the resolution. The Resolution provides a balanced budget at \$4,860,766 with no tax increase to continue the rate \$1.20 per hundred dollars of assessed value.

The Motion to consider Resolution No. 2015-28 was made by Councilperson Vannucci and seconded by Councilperson Petty. **Resolution No. 2015-28 passed** with four votes:

Councilperson Megginson - Aye  
Councilperson Vannucci - Aye  
Council President Ratchford - Aye  
Councilperson Petty - Aye  
Councilperson Di Mondì - Nay

**The motion to adjourn** was made by Councilperson Megginson, seconded by Councilperson Vannucci and passed unanimously. Council adjourned at 8:38 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet Wurtzel  
Clerk of the City of New Castle